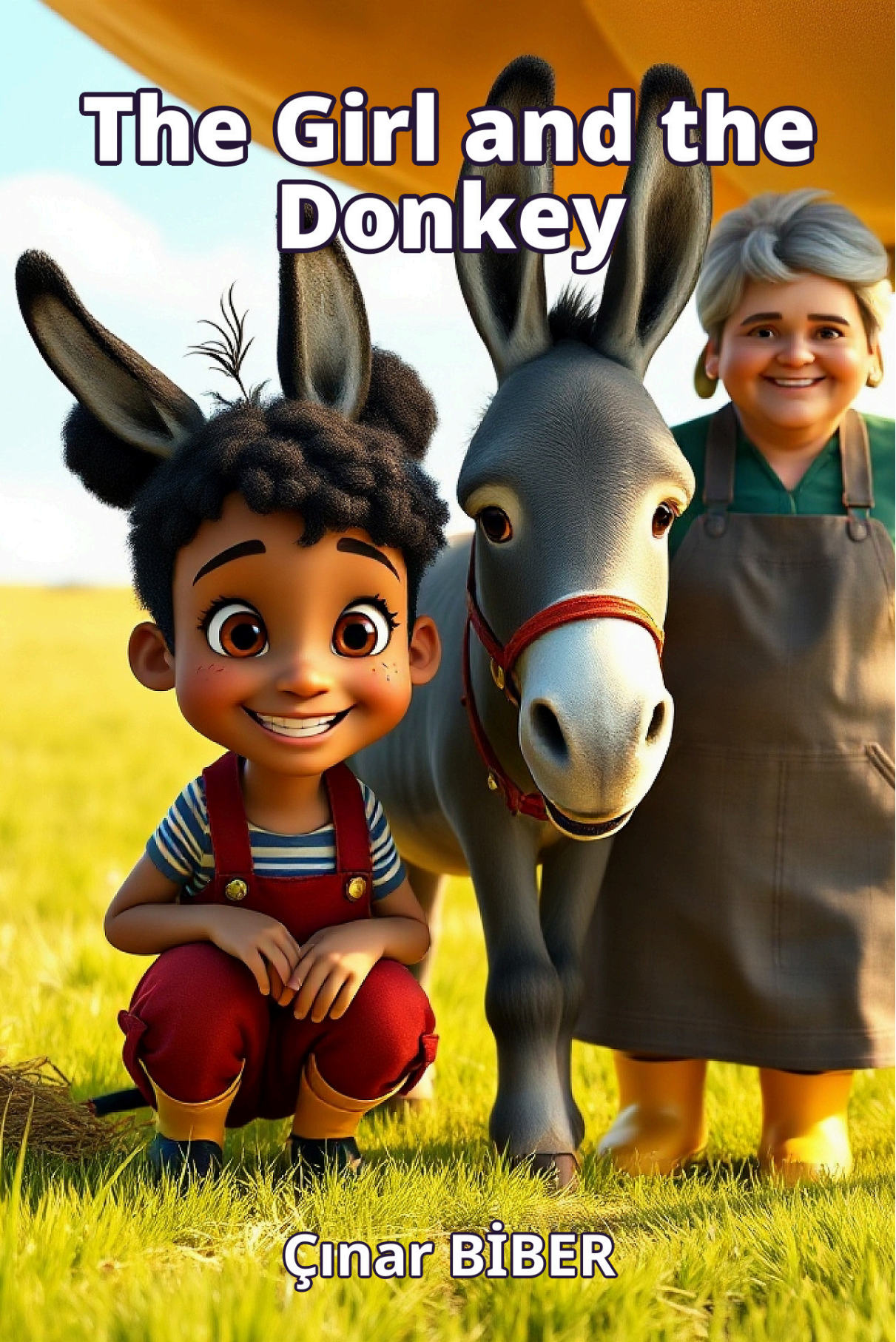
The Girl and the Donkey



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On a bright Saturday morning, Lily pulled on her yellow rain boots and red overalls. Her green sun hat bounced as she skipped down the dusty path to the animal sanctuary. Curly black hair puffed out of her two buns. She could hear soft brays floating over the fence. Today was her first day helping Marta, the sanctuary manager. Lily wondered what animals were waiting inside.

Marta met Lily at the big wooden gate. She wore a denim apron over a green shirt, and a pencil peeked from behind her ear. "Welcome, Lily!" she said with a warm smile. Behind her stood a gentle grey donkey. His long, floppy ears drooped, and a faded red halter with a tiny brass bell hung loosely around his neck. His amber eyes looked very tired.

"This is Cloppet," Marta said softly. "He worked hard for many years carrying heavy loads. Now he lives here to rest." Lily noticed the faded harness marks on his shoulders and his knobbly knees. She walked closer, slowly and quietly. "Hello, Cloppet," she whispered. The old donkey turned his grey-white muzzle toward her and gave a soft, rumbly snort.

Cloppet shuffled to the fence and rested his chin near Lily's hand. His long white eyelashes blinked slowly. Lily felt how gentle he was. "He's tired from all those years of hard work," Marta explained. "But he still loves company." Lily gently stroked his soft grey coat. "Then I'll visit every day," she promised. The little brass bell tinkled as Cloppet nudged her shoulder.

"Old animals need extra care," Marta said, pointing to a sunny corner. "Cloppet needs a cool, shaded place to rest, and gentle things to do." Lily's dark brown eyes lit up. "Can I help build it?" she asked. Marta laughed. "Of course! Grab that straw." Lily scooped big armfuls, her yellow boots crunching across the yard. Today was going to be busy.

They worked together under the hot sun. Marta showed Lily how to stretch a canvas sheet between four wooden posts. "This gives shade all afternoon," Marta explained. Lily tied the corners with strong knots and dragged soft straw inside. She placed a bucket of cool water nearby. The little shelter began to look like a cozy, quiet home. Her freckled nose wrinkled with a happy grin.

"What else does Cloppet like?" Lily wondered. Marta thought for a moment. "He's too tired for fast games. But he loves gentle things." Lily had an idea. She gathered smooth stones and made a little path. She picked a soft brush for grooming and hung a rope with a toy for nibbling. "These are calm activities," she said proudly. "Perfect for an old friend."

When Cloppet saw the shady shelter, he shuffled slowly toward it. His long ears perked up just a little. He sniffed the fresh straw, then stepped inside with a happy sigh. The canvas flapped gently above him. Lily sat nearby, humming. The old donkey closed his amber eyes and rested his grey-white muzzle on the warm straw. It was the coziest spot he had ever known.

Every day after that, Lily came back. She brushed Cloppet's soft grey coat until it shone. She fed him crunchy carrots and led him to the nibbling rope. Cloppet followed her yellow boots wherever they went. The little brass bell on his faded red halter went tinkle, tinkle as he walked. Their friendship grew a little more each day.

"Look how he perks up when you arrive," Marta said one afternoon. "You've made a big difference, Lily." Lily watched Cloppet nibble his toy, his white lashes fluttering happily. She felt a warm, proud feeling in her chest. The tired old donkey was finally getting the comfort he deserved. "He makes a difference for me too," Lily said, patting his neck.

One windy night, the canvas over Cloppet's shelter came loose. The next morning, Lily found him standing in the bright sun, blinking. "Oh no!" she gasped. But she didn't worry for long. "We can fix it together," she said bravely. Marta brought rope and pegs. Lily climbed a small stool, her curly buns bobbing, and tied strong, tidy knots. Cloppet watched with his gentle amber eyes.

By the time they finished, the shade was better than ever. Cloppet stepped under it and gave a long, happy bray. Marta clapped her strong hands. "Teamwork saves the day!" she cheered. Lily giggled, her gap-toothed smile wide. She gave Cloppet a handful of sweet hay. The old donkey leaned his grey-white muzzle against her shoulder. Together, they had made everything cozy again.

That afternoon, Lily planned a gentle surprise. She brushed Cloppet until he gleamed, then led him on a slow walk around the meadow. She picked wildflowers and tucked one into his faded red halter. Marta watched from the fence, laughing. "He hasn't looked this happy in years," she said. Cloppet trotted his knobbly knees in a little proud prance. Tinkle, tinkle went his bell.

Soon other children came to the sanctuary. Lily showed them how to build shade shelters and choose calm activities for older animals. "Old friends need rest and kindness," she told them, her green hat bobbing. The children brushed the ponies and fed the goats. Cloppet stood proudly beside Lily like a wise, grey teacher. Everyone agreed that taking care of older animals felt wonderful.

At the end of each day, Lily sat with Cloppet in the cool shade. She told him stories, and he listened with his long, floppy ears. His white muzzle rested near her knee. "You're my best friend," she whispered. The little bell tinkled softly. Cloppet gave a gentle nuzzle. In that quiet, cozy spot, they both felt safe and loved.

Marta smiled as the sun set over the sanctuary. "You've taught us all something, Lily," she said. "Older animals deserve comfort, rest, and lots of love." Lily hugged Cloppet's warm neck. His faded harness marks reminded her how hard he had worked. Now he had a shady home and a friend. And Lily knew that kindness, given every day, could make any old heart happy.